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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001349

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: DANCING ON KNIFE'S EDGE: GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY  
SPAR OVER POSSIBLE CROSS-BORDER OPERATION

REF: A. ANKARA 1326

- [B](#). ANKARA 1318
- [C](#). ANKARA 1281
- [D](#). ANKARA 1249
- [E](#). ANKARA 1239
- [F](#). ANKARA 1197
- [G](#). ANKARA 1347

Classified By: DCM NANCY MCELDFOWNEY FOR REASONS 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Amidst the charged environment of renewed PKK violence and the current political crisis, the AKP government and military continue to publicly debate by whom and how a cross-border operation (CBO) against PKK camps in northern Iraq would be ordered. This high-stakes game -- combined with hyped-up stories such as the May 24 airspace violation by U.S. F-16s, large-scale Turkish troop deployments to the southeast, and an alleged U.S. role in organizing the May 25 PKK attack on a freight train reportedly full of Iranian arms bound for Syria -- has created an atmosphere of growing tension. CHOD Buyukanit has declared that the military is ready to act, hinting that Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani could even be a target. The TGS and government are clearly using the PKK issue to play out their domestic political rivalry in the run-up to July 22 elections, making an inherently dangerous situation even more so. The anti-Barzani rhetoric and the military build-up hype are likely aimed at intimidating the Iraqi Kurd leadership and signaling to us growing Turkish impatience with lack of concrete action against the PKK in northern Iraq. End Summary.

[2](#). (C) The Turkish General Staff (TGS) and the AKP government continue to spar over how a CBO to root out PKK camps in northern Iraq would be authorized, with each side pointing to the other as the one who would order it. At an April 12 press conference, Buyukanit stated that he believed a CBO was necessary and useful, but would require parliamentary approval which had not yet been sought. On May 24 -- following the Ankara bombing -- PM Erdogan said that if the TGS requested a cross border attack, the government would provide the necessary authorization. Parliament speaker Arinc subsequently affirmed that the parliament would be ready to make an immediate decision (ref c). Buyukanit has subsequently commented that he had made his position in favor of a CBO clear, that he need not make a written request to the government for permission, and that it was up to the government to state the objectives and give the order.

¶3. (C) In May 31 remarks in Istanbul, CHOD Buyukanit said he expected the political authorities to determine the target of any Turkish intervention in Iraq. He asked rhetorically whether Turkish forces would be called upon to deal only with the PKK or with KDP leader Barzani as well, thereby suggesting TGS's interest in widening the scope of an operation to clip the Iraqi Kurds' wings. Addressing reports of a recent and large build-up of Turkish forces along the Iraqi border, Buyukanit stated that Turkish military deployments in the southeast were a normal part of counter-terrorism operations against the PKK.

¶4. (C) The U.S. has been dragged into this political tension with the May 24 airspace violation by U.S. F-16s, which many in the press have interpreted as a warning against Turkey launching a CBO into Iraq. There has also been press speculation that the U.S. was somehow behind a PKK attack on a freight train in southeastern Turkey reportedly carrying weapons and ammunition from Iran to Syria (ref g). The transition of responsibility for security from MNF-I to the Iraqi government of three northern Iraq provinces has irritated the government and fueled allegations that the U.S. has abandoned northern Iraq to the Kurdish Peshmerga (ref b).

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